

PHL 370: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (Fall 2012)
TR 1:40-2:55
Linfield Hall 234

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Office Hours: Thurs. 9-11am & by appt.
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is the relationship between philosophy and religion? This course addresses this question through an intensive introduction to continental philosophy and the history of theoretical reflection on the nature of religion. After a quick survey of classical topics in the field (proofs for the existence of God, theodicy), we shift to the recent religious or “post-secular” turn in continental thought and critical theory. Our focus this semester will be Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*. The first part of the course highlights questions of philosophical method and style. What is continental philosophy? How can a beginner break into a philosophical conversation that is always already in full swing? What is philosophy’s relationship to textual interpretation? To cultural and political critique? The second (and much longer) section of the course presents Agamben as exemplary for philosophical/theoretical reflection on religion. It combines close study of *Homo Sacer* with texts that Agamben cites and interprets in making his argument. Questions asked will include the following: What is the sacred? What is the relationship between the theological and the political? Between religion and violence?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To gain familiarity with key concepts and methods in critical theory, the philosophy of religion, and theory and method in religious studies
- To learn to read and discuss dense theoretical texts; to paraphrase their arguments accurately; and to consider their purchase on contemporary social, cultural, and political issues
- To practice skills in academic essay writing and discussion

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **10% Participation:** This is first and foremost a discussion-based seminar, and so regular, thoughtful, and informed participation will be a major course requirement. In order to contribute successfully to our conversations, you will have to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading. This means not only having read material and read it well, but also having reflected on the material before coming to class. The quality and the quantity of your contributions will be noted and will determine your final participation grade.
- **10% Passage Selection:** Each day you are to come to class having selected a single passage in the assigned reading that you think best encapsulates the text’s argument or one of its key concepts. During each class meeting, the professor will ask several

students to share their selected passages with the class as a whole. Although you need not worry about selecting the perfect passage to share with the class, your choice should reflect thoughtful engagement with the text and an ability to identify key questions and issues. Your final grade on this component of the course will be determined based both upon completion of work (i.e. you have a passage to share when called upon) and quality of work (i.e. it is an appropriate passage).

- **50% Essays:** Two 5-page essays (25% each) will respond to topics circulated by the professor. The assignment will require you to provide nuanced and accurate accounts of theoretical concepts while indicating how these concepts fit into larger philosophical conversations.
- **30% Final Paper:** A 10-page final paper will require you to “apply Agamben” to a topic that you have chosen in consultation with the professor. Further instructions about this assignment will be distributed in class.

COURSE POLICIES

- **Attendance:** Due to the dense and cumulative nature of our conversation, even a single absence will put you behind in the course. I understand that due to illness and other emergencies some students may need to miss one or two meetings. In order to accommodate such emergencies, each student will be permitted two discretionary absences. Missing more than one week, even for valid reasons, will be detrimental to your performance in the course. Consequently, each additional absence will reduce the final grade one third (A becomes A-, etc.). Chronic or extreme tardiness will be counted as absence.
- **Late Papers and Assignments:** All assignments should be turned in on time. If an assignment is turned in late, its final grade will be lowered by one letter per day. Thus, the highest possible grade for a paper turned in one day late would be a B. Papers turned in one minute after the deadline will be considered a full day late. Extensions will not be granted unless arrangements have been made at least one week in advance.
- **Academic Dishonesty:** Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. All references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the *Student Academic and Conduct Guidelines*, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Any student caught cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise engaged in academic dishonesty will fail the course and be reported to the Dean of Students.
- **Discussion Guidelines:** Religion is by nature a contentious subject matter, and thus promises to keep our conversations lively. Our task in this class will be to analyze religion as a cultural phenomenon, not to tout our own beliefs or disparage those of others. Critical thinking is a must, and it is likewise imperative that everyone approach religious texts and traditions with appropriate respect.

- **Support Services:** Montana State University provides a variety of services to ensure that you thrive, academically and otherwise. If you have a particular physical or learning disability that requires special accommodation, please contact both me *and* the Office of Disability, Re-Entry, and Veterans Services (180 Strand Union Building; x2824). Otherwise, if you think that a health problem, a family emergency, or some other life event will adversely affect your academic performance, you should contact the Dean of Students for support (174 Strand Union Building; x2826).
- **Writing Guidelines:** Good writing is revised writing. The best writers generate multiple drafts and enlist the help of readers in order to produce a smooth final product: you are no exception. A top-level paper will not only demonstrate technical mastery (i.e. it will be devoid of grammatical and stylistic errors); it will also possess a clear organizational scheme that bolsters its major argument. Top papers will advance a strong thesis statement and will support that statement with ample citations from appropriate primary and secondary sources.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, 1998)

Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago, 2006)

Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford, 2008)

Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (Norton, 1990)

Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (Picador, 2003)

N. B.: All required texts are available for purchase in the campus bookstore. On the schedule of readings, articles posted to electronic course reserves at the library website are indicated by (CR). Readings are to be completed *in advance* of the date on which they are listed.

I: RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

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| T 8/28 | Preliminaries |
| R 8/30 | The Ontological Argument (CR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ St. Anselm, “The Ontological Argument” ○ Immanuel Kant, “A Critique of the Ontological Argument” |
| T 9/4 | Cosmological and Teleological Arguments (CR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Thomas Aquinas, “The Five Ways” ○ Samuel Clarke, “The Argument from Contingency” ○ William Rowe, “An Examination of the Cosmological Argument” ○ William Paley, “The Watch and the Watchmaker” ○ David Hume, “A Critique of the Design Argument” |

- R 9/6 The Problem of Evil (CR)
 ○ Gottfried Leibniz, “The Problem Reduced to Syllogistic Form”
 ○ David Hume, “God and the Problem of Evil”
 Max Weber, “Theodicy, Salvation, and Rebirth” (CR)
- T 9/11 Michel Foucault, *Government of Self and Others*, Lecture 1, “What is Enlightenment?” (CR)
- R 9/13 Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (CR)

II: GENEALOGIES OF THE SACRED

- T 9/18 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 1-30
 Aristotle, *Politics*, short selection (CR)
- R 9/20 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 31-62
 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, “Of the Natural Condition of Mankind” and frontispiece (CR)
- T 9/25 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pp. 1-35
- R 9/27 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pp. 36-66
- T 10/2 Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy” (CR)
 Penelope Deutscher, “Deconstructive Reading” (CR)
- R 10/4 Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context” (CR)
 Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence” (CR)
- T 10/9 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 119-143
- R 10/11 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 154-180
Film: *Night and Fog* (dir. Alain Resnais, 1955)
Due: Essay #1
- T 10/16 Michel Foucault, “Right of Death and Power over Life” (CR)
- R 10/18 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, Ch. 1-3
- T 10/23 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, Ch. 4-5, 11
- R 10/25 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, Course Summary
 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, “Biopolitical Production” (CR)
- T 10/30 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 71-86
 Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Introduction, Book I

- R 11/1 Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Book III, Conclusion
- T 11/6 NO CLASS: ELECTION DAY
- R 11/8 Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Ch. 1-3
Due: Essay # 2
- T 11/13 Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Ch. 4
- R 11/15 Group Workshop on Final Papers
- T 11/20 Group Workshop on Final Papers
- R 11/22 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

III: SYNTHESIS

- T 11/27 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 1-70
 Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, short selection (CR)
- R 11/29 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 71-118
- T 12/4 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 119-165
- R 12/6 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 165-188

- The final paper is due via email at the beginning of the scheduled final exam period: December 12, 4:00pm.